We claim:

1. A system for automatically classifying a list of telephone numbers into one or more categories, the system comprising:

a processor;

a data storage medium for at least temporarily storing the list of telephone numbers;

means for accessing a telephone network; and

software operative of said processor to:

    a) Initiate calls to telephone numbers from the list of telephone numbers on a line within said telephone network;

    b) Receive and identify audible sounds on said line; and

    c) Assign one or more of the categories to each of said telephone numbers according to said audible sounds.

2. The system of claim 1 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to create a data file comprising said telephone numbers and the identity of the category assigned to each of said telephone numbers.

3. The system of claim 2 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to generate reports based on said data file.

4.   The system of claim 1 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to play an audible message over said line that requests a specific response from a callee on said line.

5.   The system of claim 4 wherein said audible message requests that said callee terminate said call.

6.   The system of claim 4 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to classify said telephone numbers as live-answered if said callee provides said specific response.

7.   The system of claim 4 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to classify said telephone numbers as not live-answered call if said call recipient does not provide said specific response.

8.   The system of claim 1 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to identify SIT tones on said line after initiating said calls.

9.   The system of claim 8 wherein said software is further operative to on said processor to classify said telephone numbers as not live-answered when said SIT tones are identified.

10. The system of claim 7 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to initiate calls to said not live-answered telephone numbers on a line within said telephone network and receive audible sounds on said line.

11. The system of claim 10 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to compare said audible sounds to one or more known audible sounds to sub-classify said not live-answered telephone numbers.

12. The system of claim 11 wherein said known audible sounds are comprised of at least portions of spoken messages.

13. The system of claim 12 wherein said spoken messages are comprised of separate messages advising that a telephone number is disconnected, has been changed, or is privacy blocked.

14. The system of claim 12 wherein said spoken messages are comprised of separate messages advising that all circuits are busy or that an area code has changed.

15. The system of claim 12 wherein said spoken messages are comprised of common corporate and answering system greetings.

16.   The system of claim 11 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to identify and classify a telephone number from which audible sounds are received that are not similar to said one or more known audible sounds.

17.   The system of claim 11 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to create a data file comprising said not answered telephone numbers and a sub-classification for each of said not live-answered telephone numbers based on said one or more known audible sounds.

18.   The system of claim 17 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to generate reports based on said data file.

19.   The system of claim 1 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to at least temporarily store said audible sounds received over said line on said data storage medium prior to identifying said audible sounds.

20.   The system of claim 19 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to complete said call after receiving and storing said audible sounds but prior to identifying said audible sounds.

13

21.   The system of claim 19 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to play an audible message over said line that requests a specific response from a callee on said line.

22.   The system of claim 21 wherein said audible message requests that a callee on said line terminate said call.

23.   The system of claim 21 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to classify said telephone numbers as live-answered if said call recipient provides said specific response.

24.   The system of claim 21 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to classify said telephone numbers as not live-answered if said callee does not provide said specific response.

25.   The system of claim 19 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to identify SIT tones on said line after initiating said calls.

26.   The system of claim 25 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to classify said telephone numbers as not live-answered when said SIT tones are identified.

14

27.   The system of claim 24 wherein said software is further operative on said processor to compare said audible sounds to one or more known audible sounds to sub-classify said not live-answered telephone number.

28.   The system of claim 27 wherein said known audible sounds are comprised of at least portions of spoken messages.